

HUNTING THE HORNED FLAT NOSED BEAST

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Ceratotherium simum – is the scientific bi-nominal for the White Rhino. Derived from Greek, it means the ‘horned flat-nosed beast’.¹

THE MOST ACCEPTED LEGEND OF HOW AND WHY WE CALL THIS SPECIES A ‘WHITE RHINO’ IS MISTRANSLATION FROM DUTCH TO ENGLISH. THE ENGLISH WORD "WHITE" IN ENGLISH IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN DERIVED BY MISTRANSLATION OF THE DUTCH WORD "WIJD", WHICH MEANS "WIDE" IN ENGLISH. THE WORD "WIDE" REFERS TO THE WIDTH OF THE RHINO’S MOUTH. EARLY ENGLISH-SPEAKING SETTLERS IN SOUTH AFRICA MISINTERPRETED THE "WIJD" FOR "WHITE", AND THE RHINO WITH THE WIDE MOUTH ENDED UP BEING CALLED WHITE RHINO.²

The conditions read “a post-productive male” to be identified by Namibian Nature Conservation rangers. This sounded reasonable, as the auction closed on our family for the Waterberg National Park hunting concession in April 2009. We were excited at the prospect of hunting an area that had not been hunted in eight years, and knew that there was a lot of hard work, sweat and some blood that would be let in order to make this concession a success.



We successfully tracked several Rhino in the park to orientate ourselves with their behavior and movements before our first hunters arrived. I had hunted White Rhino previously, but on private land where there were usually just one or two individuals that could be targeted. There are only a handful of hunting areas left in Africa where one can hunt in the classic style of choosing the appropriate sized track, tracking, spotting and stalking and choosing a trophy that appeal to both the P.H. and client.

It is said that hunting a White Rhino is like stalking and hunting a bus parked in a parking lot, which is not difficult and a real let down. This is however not the case. White Rhino are highly alert. Ears independently turning to any sound like radar dishes and olfactory passages which are responsible for smell that are larger than their entire brain make this animal challenging to approach. Once spooked, they run for miles, watching their back-track and fleeing at any sound, manmade or otherwise. The 2 – 4.5 ton target is large, and of all of the dangerous game huntable in Africa, a backup shot is easiest on this game species.

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Rhinoceros

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_Rhinoceros



Is this the easiest of the *'modern big five'* to hunt? I would have to answer yes. Of the *'dangerous seven'*, including Hippo and Crocodile, I would say Hippo is the easiest to hunt, followed by the White Rhino. Of the *'classic big five'* which is fortunately huntable again in Africa today, where would we place the unpredictable Black Rhino?

We had tracked 'our bull' for twelve kilometers on this day of days. The tracks showing the dominant territorial bull dragging his feet and spraying urine on bushes every 30 meters, and at intervals enormous territorial dung middens marking its territory as a warning for any other that may dare enter. The hunter was finally in camp, and we had a heightened sense of urgency not felt when scouting a hunting area. We had caught up to the bull in a beautiful valley we had yet to explore, and wanted him to bed down in the heat of the day before we brought the hunter in. We could have taken him several times in the twists and turns that the beautiful valley offered, but we had to wait. The hunter was not with us, not in great shape, and at 72 years old, we granted him this privilege. Having chatted and taken a nap for about an hour, the hunting party decided to slowly follow this ancient bull to where he lay. His front horn was prominent, with scars from a recent fight obvious at a distance of 30 yards with the naked eye. His rear horn was severed, sacrificed to Diana, the Goddess of the hunt, in a nameless place in the red dune sand of the Namibian Waterberg. I had tracked this bull once before, a few months prior, his single horn and body size unmistakable. Adrenaline primed, we slowly followed his clover-toed tracks. The pace of his feeding slowed, and the meander in his trail indicated he must be resting just ahead. A bus should be easy to see in thick bush? This is definitely not the case, the armor grey of his inch-thick skin blending in with the shadows cast by the foliage of the recent rains. Every shadow was inspected. The trail led us into cliff passages that made the pursuers uneasy. If the armor clad pre-historic beast came trundling

down this corridor, there was no way out. This labyrinth twisted, turned and split, with trees and fine grass growing in cracks and crevices of the cliff faces. Around a tight turn, where his belly skin must have scraped the side of the canyon, the hunting party came to a halt. This would *not* be a good place to shoot this Rhino, I thought to myself. The logistics of it would be impossible, at least two kilometers from the closest road, and we would only be able to get a vehicle within about one kilometer of this place for a recovery. This was not to be an issue, as we stood staring at the shadow of what we

thought was, slowly rose as the wind shifted. With a thunder of padded feet, broken bushes in his wake, the Rhino was gone.



Several hours later, the hunter was with us. We had followed up the quarry once more. In the rolling sand dunes, in the thick cover of the high ground, we advanced slowly. The wind was decent, but shifted to and fro occasionally. Our



hunting party was too large, with two government rangers (which are required), one tracker, one hunting apprentice, the hunter and myself. Two people were too many in the dry leaf strewn bush. We never the less advanced. The rangers had to make sure we were on the same rhino's track. The hunting party was sure of its target.

In the shadows, a slightly different shadow was seen. The two rangers and I slowly crept up to make sure of the sex and age of the beast.

After a frustrating interlude

convincing the rangers that this was indeed 'our' bull, the same track that we had followed all day, we were in agreement. It seemed the most difficult part of our day was behind us.



The hunter's elegant Sauer .375 H&H was loaded with solids. Step by step, our feet pushed through the cover of the leaves with our toes, carefully placed on the naked sand below, as we slowly pushed the leaves away to make way for those behind. We finally made our way to the resting place of this colossal creature. At 25 yards, there was just a small opening through which to see our prey. The horizontal fold of the front shoulder, a heart / lung shot, was visible to the experienced eye but not to our hunters. We needed to get closer. At 20 yards, shooting stick up, there came a quiet explanation. "See that black stick... those green leaves... though that hole... see the fold... that is your Rhino."

Nothing. The hunter was looking 'at' the bush instead of 'through' the bush. Our quarry heard or smelled something and suddenly stood from his slumber. A few seconds later the hunter exclaimed "the big grey thing is the rhino?! And that is the fold of his shoulder?!" and with that the shot was taken. I barely had time to get off a raking shot with my .416 Remington before the ferocious growl, crashing of bushes and not so small trees was met with a silence and a cloud of dust.

It was amazing how fast the world's second largest land mammal can move when motivated, up to speeds of 50 km/h (31 mph). The follow up was immediate, and our 'horned flat nosed beast' had found his last resting place not 80 yards away.

The hunter was overwhelmed, the hunting party in celebratory spirit. And all at once, the hunting party withdrew, and left the hunter alone with his quarry. It all got very quiet again as the hunter circled the hunted in quiet reflection. A memory etched in the recesses of his brain for the rest of time.

